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## BOOK REVIEWS.

RECENT TENDENCIES IN ETHICS: THREE LECTURES TO CLERGY GIVEN AT CAMBRIDGE. By W. R. Sorley, M. A., Hon. LL. D. (Edin.), Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1904.

This little book consists of three lectures on "Some Leading Features of the Ethical Thought of the Present Day," delivered at Cambridge (England) to a summer meeting of clergy held there in July, 1903. The chapters in the books are headed respectively: "Characteristics," "Ethics and Evolution," "Ethics and Idealism."

In the first chapter Professor Sorley says that in "English Ethical thought during the last century . . . the controversies of the time centered almost exclusively round two questions: the question of the origin of moral ideas, and the question of the criterion of moral value." Moralists were separated "into two hostile schools, known as Utilitarian and Intuitionist." The Utilitarian school held that moral ideas "could be traced to experience; and by 'experience' they meant in the last resort sense-perceptions and the feelings of pleasure and pain which accompany or follow sense-perception" (p. 2). With regard to the standard of morality "they held that the distinction between right and wrong depended upon the consequences of an action in the way of pleasure and pain" (p. 3).

On the other hand the Intuitionists maintained that moral ideas were in their origin spiritual, although they might be called into definite consciousness by the experience of the facts to which they could be applied.

With regard to the criterion of morality they held that "moral ideas themselves had an independent validity; they had a worth and authority for conduct which could not be accounted for by any consequences in which action resulted" (p. 5). However (and here we get for the first time the *raison d'être* of Mr. Sorley's book), "the Utilitarians no more than the Intuitionists were opponents of the traditional—as we may call it—the Christian morality of modern civilisation" (p. 7). "Their controversies were almost entirely of what may be called an academic kind, and, however decided, would have little effect upon a man's practical attitude. But it would not be possible to make any such confident assertion regarding the ethical controversies of the

present day" (p. 12). It appears as if modern controversy "would not hesitate to call in question the received code of morality, and to revise our standard of right and wrong" (p. 13). "It is on this ground, therefore—because I believe that the ethical question is no longer so purely an academic question as it was some years ago, because it affects not only the philosophic thinker but the practical man who is concerned with the problems of his day—that I have selected the topic for these lectures" (p. 13). "Perhaps we might trace the beginnings of this controversy as to the content of what is right and what is wrong to an older opposition in ethical thought . . . the controversy of Egoism and Altruism" (p. 14). But while both egoist and utilitarians have agreed "to insist that morality means the same for both, . . . on the other hand, the more recent tendency to which I refer emphasises and exalts the egoistic side, and thus accentuates the difference between the new moral code—if we may call it moral—and the Christian morality" (p. 18).

"Nietzsche, the *enfant terrible* of modern thought, is the 'boldest exponent' of this tendency" (p. 32). He maintains that man's life must be interpreted "physiologically only and not spiritually," and he would "replace philanthropy by a boundless egoism."

The trend which Professor Sorley thus describes in modern ethical thought, he ascribes in large measure to the material success of last century; to the feeling of irresponsible power in those who have accumulated vast wealth—"the world seems to lie before them as something to be bought and sold;" "they are unrestrained by the traditional obligations of ancient lineage"; to a slackened feeling for duty, and a lessened belief in human goodness, which Mr. Sorley apprehends in literature, of which Ibsen's and Zola's works are taken as typical. A misapplication of the biological doctrine of "natural selection" is also responsible for a large measure of the present confusion of ethical thought.

This brings the reader to Chapter II, in which this misapplication is dealt with at length. The line taken is that with which readers of Mr. Sorley's "Ethics of Naturalism" have been made familiar. "Natural Selection" is, in biological evolution, a negative process. Nature produces spontaneously variation; the unfit are eliminated by Natural Selection. Fitness, in the individual, implies the qualities of strength, courage, prudence, and temperance; in the group, self-restraint, self-sacrifice, and obedience must be added. But how shall we account for the development

of such qualities as philanthropy and sympathy beyond the point at which they can be said to make for the efficiency of the group in its struggle for existence? Here another form of natural selection comes into play, viz., the competition of ideas, and the survival of the fittest. At this point, Mr. Sorley thinks, the theory of natural selection breaks down. "Bishop Wilberforce was killed by a fall from his horse, not by the triumphant dialectic of Professor Huxley. Sir Richard Owen lived to a patriarchal old age, and did not disappear from the face of the earth because he still clung to an idea which the best intellect of his time had relinquished."<sup>1</sup>

"What was it then that led to the victory of the one idea over the other? The cause was intellectual. With the experts it was logical conviction. . . . With men in general" it was adoption or imitation of "the ideas of those who knew" (p. 59). "It was therefore not natural selection at all. . . . One idea was deliberately accepted and the other deliberately rejected. . . . But natural selection is a physical, external, objective process. . . . It is simply natural law."

Here (p. 60) as elsewhere "Nature" seems for Professor Sorley the unconscious. And though he would doubtless deny the intention, he seems to use the terms "objective" and "external" as though to be objective were to be external to mind. Moreover, "simply natural law" seems to be a law that does not run in mind. To be "subjective" is to be out of the domain of "natural law." But when Mr. Sorley maintains that the distinctive characteristic of human action is that it implies choice, he is also obliged to admit that "choice always follows some kind of principle" (p. 78); and if the principle that choice always follows is—in the last resort—logical necessity, have we not here also a "natural law"? Have we not also something "objective" which is at the same time within mind?

In Chapter III, Professor Sorley deals with the ethics of modern Idealism, as represented by the "Prolegomena to Ethics" of T. H. Green; the "Appearance and Reality" of Mr. F. H. Bradley; and the "Problem of Conduct" of Mr. A. E. Taylor. While holding Green's "Prolegomena" to have been the "contribution of greatest value" made by "this idealist movement" "to English

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<sup>1</sup> Is it logical to lay the premises in the intellectual plane—the conflict of ideas—and to draw the conclusion in the biological plane—the survival or otherwise of the men? Most men have more than one idea.

thought" (p. 88), Mr. Sorley finds within it the germs of the tendency which he most deplotes in more recent Idealism. "Those whose business it is to test intellectual notions," he says, "have been impressed by the difficulties involved in Green's metaphysical positions and in his connection of them with morality" (p. 90). These difficulties may be gathered together as represented by Green's use of the word "self-realisation," and by the connection of the implied point of view with his metaphysical doctrine that "the consciousness which is in man and which raises him above nature is the manifestation of—the 'reproduction' of itself by—an eternal self-consciousness" (p. 97).

In order that the practical value of this conception may justify itself, it is necessary that "the distinction of good from evil must be first of all made clear. Green's appeal to an eternal self-consciousness does nothing of itself to elucidate this distinction. Tendencies to exalt selfish interest over common welfare, and to prefer sensual to what are called higher gratifications, enter into the nature of man, and have fashioned his history. Green does not even ask the question whether these also are not to be considered manifestations, or 'reproductions' of the eternal self-consciousness. But his metaphysical view does not exclude them; and if they are included, morality disappears for lack of any criterion between good and evil" (p. 99). This passage is exceedingly characteristic of Mr. Sorley's whole attitude throughout this book.

Mr. Bradley develops, in Mr. Sorley's judgment, this fundamental mistake of Green's. "Like Green, he looks upon man's moral activity as an appearance—what Green calls a reproduction—of this eternal reality" (p. 101), and, "he brings out the consequence, which in Green is more or less concealed, that the evil equally with the good in man and in the world are appearances of the Absolute." "Mr. Bradley's Absolute (p. 106) is eternal, relationless, ineffable. To it goodness cannot be ascribed; indeed, no predicate can be properly applied to it, for any predication implies relation." "If all predication involves relation, and relation is excluded from reality, then no predicate—not even truth and goodness—can be asserted of the real" (p. 102).

"From the monistic view of morality, as set forth by Mr. Bradley, there is no direct route to the distinction between good and evil. If the distinction is reached at all it will be found to be psychological rather than cosmical, to be relative to the attitude

of the human mind which contemplates the facts, and in this strict sense to be, what Mr. Bradley calls it, appearance" (p. 109). Good is "that which satisfies desire" (p. 110). It is "co-extensive with approbation" (p. 111). "This approval is still simply a feeling of some individual person" (p. 112). Thus Mr. Bradley's theory "does not advance us at all towards determining the validity of this approval, or towards an objective criterion of distinguishing 'good' from evil" (p. 113). Mr. Bradley, moreover, holds that "Two great divergent forms of moral goodness exist. . . . These are 'self-assertion and self-sacrifice' (p. 118). "System" is aimed at by the former, width by the latter. Mr. Sorley holds that "neither on the method of system and self-assertion nor on the method of expansion and self-sacrifice has the author given or suggested any criterion for the distinction of good and evil. He has cast his net so wide as to include all conduct within it without discrimination of moral worth. . . . The good as such has never been reached at all, nor any tenable suggestion offered for distinguishing it from evil" (p. 121).

Mr. Sorley concludes: "I have contended in these lectures that neither the mechanical unity of the naturalists nor the rational unity of the idealists has succeeded in comprehending within its unifying principle the essential nature of morality with its deep-going dualism of good and evil" (p. 133).

"The moral concept (p. 131)—whether described as worth or as duty or as goodness—cannot be distilled out of any knowledge about the laws of existence or of occurrence. Nor will speculation about the real conditions of experience yield it, unless adequate recognition be first of all given to the fact that the experience which is the subject-matter of philosophy is not merely a sensuous and thinking, but also a moral, experience."

Professor Sorley's book is avowedly addressed to those whose interest in life is practical rather than theoretical; its aim is obviously to be practically helpful to such people, who must, however, be people who have turned to philosophy for some measure of practical guidance, or at least for fuller illumination of a world which such students approach from the side of practical interest. The main question, therefore, for its critic is: does the book fulfill its purpose? Is it likely to give efficient direction and assistance to such students? It must be owned that to the present critic it seems chiefly to warn off from the realm of philosophy all students of the quality described. All philosophy, they are told, is full of

pitfalls: ancient philosophy is pervaded throughout its length and breadth by two unsolved contradictions, that between Egoism and Altruism on the one hand, and that between Necessity and Free Will on the other. If, in despair of solving, or escaping, these the student bethinks him of modern philosophy, a still deadlier danger lies in wait for him. The two ancient horrors have given birth to a modern monster by whom the unwary will be not only mentally confused, but morally corrupted. One cannot wonder if such people will add the authority of a philosopher to the authority of "the Christian morality of modern civilisation" and refrain from further inquiry.

That would be, often, an excellent result. But is it the result desired by Professor Sorley?

Seriously, though the difficulty of presenting philosophical ideas to a popular audience is very great, it is not so insurmountable as to justify a philosopher in simply stating puzzles without giving his hearers any clue or hint as to the solution, or as to the direction in which solution might be sought. The difficulty has been overcome many times in recent years. An instance might be given in a field of philosophy other than that touched upon by Professor Sorley, viz., Prof. A. C. Bradley's lecture: "Poetry for Poetry's Sake" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).

It is perhaps not too much to say that both in method and in implied point of view Mr. Sorley's book is too slight and too old-fashioned to do justice either to recent philosophy, or to Professor Sorley's position in it.

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London.

METHODS OF INDUSTRIAL PEACE. By N. P. Gilman. New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. London: Macmillan Co. Pp. x, 430.

"Within two years there will be the greatest struggle between organised labor and organised capital that the United States has yet seen." This prophecy, made to me last October by an American economist, bids fair to receive ample fulfillment in the many grave conflicts now in progress in various parts of America. The organisation of labor has gone on apace; probably between three and four millions of industrial workers are enrolled members of labor unions, a number twice as large as three or four years ago. Such a rapid influx of new blood has naturally imbued leaders and followers alike with a sense of increased strength and a deter-